

Hand Foot and Mouth Disease

Description:

Hand, foot and mouth disease is caused by a number of different viruses including coxsackieviruses and enterovirus 71). It is not a serious illness and has nothing to do with animal diseases with similar names (i.e. foot and mouth disease in livestock, or paw and mouth disease in cats). It is a relatively common illness in children and outbreaks often occur among groups of children, especially in child care centres.

Symptoms:

The symptoms of this disease include blisters inside the cheeks, gums and on the sides of the tongue, as well as on the hands and feet. Although it is not common, blisters may be seen in the nappy area. Children with hand, foot and mouth disease may have a low fever, be listless and off their food for a day or two.

The blisters usually persist for 7 to 10 days.

People can spread the virus while there is fluid in the blisters. Faeces can remain infectious for several weeks.

Treatment:

Usually no treatment is required.

Control

Children with hand, foot and mouth disease should be excluded from child care or school until all blisters have dried.

Prevention:

The best form of protection is good hygiene:

- wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 ¹ seconds and dry thoroughly before handling food, after going to the toilet, touching soiled linen and articles and changing nappies.
- implement good cleaning procedures.
- allow blisters to dry naturally. The blisters should not be deliberately pierced because the fluid within the blisters is infectious.

Help and Assistance

For further information, please contact your local doctor, community health centre, nearest public health unit or the 13HEALTH information line (13 43 25 84).

References

Heymann, D., ed. 2008. *Control of Communicable Diseases Manual*, 19th edition. Washington, DC: American Public Health Association.

Related Content

[Enterovirus 71 neurological disease fact sheet](#)

¹ *Hand Hygiene Australia and Draft Staying Healthy in Childcare recommend 20 seconds now* <http://www.hha.org.au/>, <http://www.hha.org.au/UserFiles/file/Brochures/ChildrenBrochure2011-05-09>.
The footnote is for the consultation phase only.